

# Documents on Diplomacy: Lessons

## "Ice, Ice, Baby" William Seward and Alaska

Standard: I. Culture  
V. Individuals, Groups, and Institutions  
VII. Production, Distribution, and Consumption  
IX. Global Connections  
X. Civic Ideals and Practices

Grade Level: 9–12

Objectives: The student will:

- Analyze the purchase of Alaska in 1867
- Assess domestic and international political scenes during the time of Alaska's purchase
- Evaluate the diplomatic efforts of William Seward
- Determine the geographic, political, and economic factors of the purchase

Time: 2 class periods (less, if all activities are not used)

Materials: Documents: **1867** *Alaska: a Brilliant Achievement*  
**1867** *The Cession of Russian Possessions in North America by His Majesty the Emperor of All the Russias to the United States of America*

Resources: Reading: *The Purchase of Alaska, 1867* (not printed)  
<http://history.state.gov/milestones/1866-1898/AlaskaPurchase>

Political Cartoon: *The Big Thing* (included in exercise)

<http://www.loc.harpweek.com/09Cartoon/BrowseByDateCartoon.asp?Month=April&Date=20>

Explanation of *The Big Thing* (not printed)

<http://www.loc.harpweek.com/09Cartoon/BrowseByDateCartoon.asp?Month=April&Date=20>

Exercises: *Political Cartoon: Interpreting "The Big Thing"*  
*The National Ice-House Game Boards*  
*The National Ice-House Questions*  
*Ice-Cube Game Pieces* (cut into individual pieces prior to activity)

Procedures:

### *Background Information:*

1. Provide students with the reading, *Purchase of Alaska, 1867*.

2. If time permits, have students read the biography of William Henry Seward provided as a resource (and used in lesson, *Testing, Testing...Is the Monroe Doctrine Working?*).

**3.** Distribute copies of the documents, *Alaska: A Brilliant Achievement* and *The Cession of Russian Possessions in North America by His Majesty....*

Have students compile information from these documents and background readings. These questions may be used as a guide to or a discussion of readings:

- a. Cassius M. Clay was the U.S. Minister to Russia. What was his opinion of the Alaska purchase?
- b. What does Clay see of value in Alaska?
- c. Who are the "ins" and "outs" according to Clay?
- d. What role did England play in the deal between Russia and the United States?
- e. Describe the relationship between Russia and the United States as viewed by Clay.
- f. Identify each negotiator of the Cession treaty by name and title.
- g. Most of the treaty is devoted to specific geographic parameters of the purchased land. Examine a map of the United States today. What observations can be made about the location of Alaska? (Discontiguous, strategically near Russia and Canada, access to Arctic region, open to the Pacific, access to Asia)
- h. How is religion included in the treaty?
- i. What could Russian residents in Alaska choose to do after the conclusion of the treaty?
- j. What happened to the "uncivilized tribes?"
- k. What was the final payment for the land?
- l. Analyze Seward's efforts in achieving the purchase of Alaska. Did he make a good deal?

**4.** Discuss students' answers to the suggested questions. (*Note to teacher:* The readings and questions establish foundations of knowledge to complete either or both of the following activities.)

*Applying Information: A Political Cartoon*

**1.** An important aspect of Seward's deal with Russia was the reaction of the press, politicians, and citizens to the purchase. Provide students with the cartoon, *The Big Thing*.

**2.** Analyze the cartoon according to the questions provided. (*Note to teacher:* The exercise, *Explanation of Political Cartoon: The Big Thing*, may be used only by the teacher to debrief efforts of the students **or** as a handout to the students once they have analyzed the cartoon. It is an excellent source of background information in addition to explaining the cartoon.)

**3.** Discuss the students' interpretations of the cartoon.

*Applying Information: The National Ice-House Game*

1. Divide class into groups of 4–5 students.
2. Provide each group with a *National Ice-House Game Board* and a supply of *Ice Cube Game Pieces* (no more than 10 per group).
3. Teacher's instructions to students:
  - a. You have game boards with answers to questions about the Alaska Purchase.
  - b. Each game board has a different mixture of answers.
  - c. As I read each question, you are to seek the answer on your Board.
  - d. If you have the answer, place an ice cube on the igloo block.
  - e. When you feel that your group has all the correct answers, shout "Ice, Ice, Baby!"
  - f. I will check to see if, indeed, your answers are correct. If so, all students will clear their boards of ice cubes and we will play another round.
  - g. If the group has an incorrect answer, we will continue the game.
  - h. I will check answers each time I hear "Ice, Ice, Baby."
  - i. It is important that each group QUIETLY matches answers to questions; otherwise, other groups may benefit from hearing your discussions/answers.
  - j. We will play until all questions have been asked **AND** answered.
4. The teacher may decide what "rewards" might be offered to the winners.
5. Debrief the game by discussing the answers to questions and, therefore, reviewing the story of the purchase of Alaska.

*Additional Information:*

1. Biography of Cassius M. Clay, <http://moscow.usembassy.gov/ministers-and-ambassadors.html>

*Note to teacher:* Students who know their sports may ask if Ambassador Cassius Marcellus Clay was an ancestor of the boxer, Muhammad Ali, whose original name, before converting to Islam, was Cassius Clay. They were not related, but Muhammad Ali's father was named after Ambassador Clay, a famous abolitionist.

2. Alaska Day is a legal holiday in the U.S. state of Alaska, which is observed on October 18<sup>th</sup>. It is the anniversary of the formal transfer of the Territory of Alaska from Russia to the United States on this date in 1867 in Sitka. A formal flag ceremony involved the Russians lowering their flag, and the United States raising the Stars and Stripes.

**3.** William Seward and Edward Stoeckl, at one point during their discussions, used the new transatlantic cable, completed in 1866, to agree quickly on the re-negotiated price of \$7.2 million. Without this new technology, the terms of the agreement would have been significantly delayed and the deal might not have been completed. This is an early example of the impact that technology has on international diplomacy.

For more information about the transatlantic cable, see:

<http://history.state.gov/milestones/18661898/Telegraph>.